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Boonies ready to
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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Veterinarian Eugenio Mannucci places an acupuncture needle into the muscle on the lower back of a 12-year-old quarter horse recently while treating the animal at the Oregon Trail Veterinary Clinic in Hermiston.

Needle in the neigh

Hermiston veterinarian finds niche in animal acupuncture

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

A track scholarship lured Eugenio Mannucci to the United States, but true love and a job in veterinary medicine is why he stayed.

The All-American shot putter from Italy recently started work as a veterinarian at Hermiston's Oregon Trail Veterinary Clinic, where he practices traditional medicine and acupuncture on animals large and small.

Recently, Mannucci stood in the clinic's outdoor treatment area staring into a horse's mouth. Inside the cavity, he saw that the 16-year-old's teeth had become wavy and rough, which made it difficult for her to slide her teeth from side to side to eat grass. Mannucci reached for a long-handled grinding tool called a float and flipped on the switch — imagine a tiny disc sander on a pole. The sedated strawberry roan seemed oblivious to the high-pitched whine, her eyelids drooping. White tooth dust floated from the horse's slack-jawed mouth, which was held open with a speculum. Unlike human teeth, horses' teeth keep erupting indefinitely. The veterinarian worked to fashion a smooth surface and then used a rasp to finish the job.

Watching Mannucci work, one can imagine the tall, muscular 29-year-old spinning in a shot put circle and launching a 16-pound orb into the sky. He moves easily, gracefully. The University of Idaho star qualified for the NCAA track-and-field meet twice, was a three-time Western Athletic Conference champ and a five-time first-team all-WAC honoree. In 2011, he placed 15th nationally with a throw of 60 feet, 5.75 inches. Before Idaho, he competed in shot put for the Italian Army.

Mannucci has brains, too, along with his brawn. He was named top WAC male athlete for academics and University of Idaho's pre-veterinary student of the year.

He comes to Hermiston from an all-equine hospital and rehabilitation center in



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Assistant Breanna Walchli holds the halter of a 12-year-old quarter horse as veterinarian Eugenio Mannucci performs a range-of-motion test on the animal's hind leg recently at the Oregon Trail Veterinary Clinic in Hermiston.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Veterinarian Eugenio Mannucci checks the dental health of a three-year-old quarter horse recently in Hermiston.

Decatur, Texas, where he focused on equine reproduction, acupuncture, ultrasound and treating horses for lameness, colic and other ills.

One might wonder how an Italian shot putter with his eye on a career in veterinary medicine ended up in Hermiston, Oregon.

Credit Mykael Bothum, a Hermiston native who eventually became Mannucci's wife. The two met on the first day of track practice in 2009. Mykael, who threw shot put at Hermiston High School, was also a standout athlete. She obliterated her high school mark and other subsequent collegiate personal bests with a throw of 56 feet, 5.25 inches — 12th among American women in 2010.

That same year, *Spokesman Review* reporter John Blanchette described Eugenio and Mykael as "the only couple on campus who can squat 750 pounds between them in the weight room." They married and now have two children with another on the way.

But that is jumping ahead. Smitten with Mykael almost immediately, Mannucci often traveled home with her to Hermiston. There, his future father-in-law, David Bothum, a former professional saddle bronc rider and one of the Farm City Pro Rodeo, introduced Mannucci to rodeo. Mannucci was pressed into service, doing such tasks as

opening and closing bucking chute gates and removing saddles. Enamored especially with the powerful, big-boned bucking horses, he started thinking about becoming a large animal veterinarian.

Mannucci graduated from Idaho and attended veterinary school at Oregon State University where he trained in traditional medicine, but was also fascinated to learn about equine and bovine acupuncture, the act of placing thin needles on certain points on an animal's body. He completed an acupuncture course at Colorado State University. These days, his acupuncture needles are an oft-used tool.

"There is so much we can do with Western medicine — honestly, there's a lot we can do," Mannucci said. "But there are some cases that don't respond to Western medicine."

At this point, your mind might drift to an image of a human getting acupuncture, lying flat and relaxed on a table, and wonder how a horse or bull might respond to getting stuck with needles.

"Usually, they enjoy it," Mannucci said. "Acupuncture releases endorphins and over time they like it. I've only had one or two I've had to sedate."

He said the techniques

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provides pain relief and helps animals recover from facial paralysis and other muscle and nerve injuries. If a horse came into the clinic huffing and puffing and unable to sweat, a session of acupuncture might help the animal release its body heat. And there are other uses.

"They do a lot of acupuncture for bucking bulls in Colorado," he said. "Acupuncture is good for reproductive problems in bulls."

Mannucci didn't have long to talk about acupuncture or anything else. The clinic was hopping.

He examined a dog with an infected uterus, vaccinated a sheltie and oversaw the cleaning of a trembling Papillon's anal glands. After examining a lethargic sheep named Bambi who had stopped eating, he placed her under a warming light, inserted an IV tube and sutured it into place.

He administered medication, started hydration and placed a hand on the shoulder of the sheep's owner, Randy Cook, who had brought the ailing animal from Pendleton. "Now, it's just a waiting game," Mannucci told him.

The pace is brisk, but the veterinarian said he likes it that way, though he treasures his time with family, too. Maybe during some of his time away from the clinic he and Mykael will teach their children how to throw the shot put.

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